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The Romance of the Western Bower, Zhao the Orphan, Snow in Summer (Love Stories and Tragedies from Chinese Classic Operas)

Wang Shifu, Ji Junxiang, Guan Hanqing

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The Romance of the Western Bower On his way to the capital to sit for the civil service examination, Zhang Junrui, a gifted scholar of the Tang Dynasty, pays a visit to the Salvation Monastery where he encounters the famed beauty Oriole, daughter of late Prime Minister Cui. Oriole and her mother Madam Cui are staying in the western bower of the monastery to take refuge from the disruptions caused by the bandit Sun the Flying Tiger. Junrui gets himself installed in a room near Oriole to catch a glimpse of the exquisite girl. He then serenades her with the lute, winning her heart. All is endangered when Sun the Flying Tiger surrounds the monastery with 5,000 men demanding Oriole's hand in marriage. In desperation, Madam Cui promises to give her daughter's hand to anyone who can lift the siege. Using his wit, Zhang writes a letter to his sworn brother Du Que, a powerful military general, who comes immediately to the rescue and crushes the bandits. Just as Junrui is about to claim Oriole's hand in marriage, Madam Cui sets a new demand: that he must become the country's top scholar before she will agree to marry her daughter. Now, the young lovers must overcome yet another obstacle to their happiness. Zhao the Orphan During the Spring and Autumn Period (770-476 BC), Zhao Dun, prime minister in the State of Jin, tries his utmost to reign-in the dissolute ways of his sovereign, Duke Ling. However, his efforts are thwarted by the evil counselor Tu an Gu who encourages the Duke s wanton behavior to usurp his power. To clear the path, Tu an Gu hires an assassin to murder the righteous prime minister Zhao Dun. When the plot fails, he persuades Duke Ling to declare Zhao Dun a traitor and raises a troop to murder all 300 members of the Zhao clan. After this devastating bloodbath, the only member of the Zhao clan that remains alive is the unborn child inside the womb of Duke Ling s sister. Hence the heroic tragedy begins, as the loyal followers of the prime minister plot an elaborate and perilous scheme to save the infant and divert the murderous rage of Tu'an Gu, who orders the killing of all infants under the age of six months once he discovers that the newborn child has escaped. Will Zhao the Orphan survive to later exact vengeance on Tu an Gu for the blood of his 300 kinsmen? Snow in Summer During the late Yuan Dynasty, Dou E, a dutiful and principled girl, is raised by the weak-minded Madam Cai, who takes the destitute girl as a potential wife for her sickly son. In exchange, Madam Cai provides Dou E s father, Dou Tianzhang, with the funds necessary to finance his trip to the capital to take the imperial examinations. Despite her misfortune, Dou E endures her hardships alongside Madam Cai, and marries her sickly son at the age of 18. However, misfortune strikes and within three months, Dou E is widowed. Worse calamities await her when Madam Cai s effort to collect money from her creditors gets her nearly killed and she is saved by the father-son hooligan pair, Zhang the Dog and Zhang the Mule. The Zhang duo invade Madam Cai s house and insist that she and Dou E marry them. Dou E refuses, and steadfastly incurs the wrath the men who decide to punish her. A terrible murder gives rise to a false judgment by corrupt officials, and snow falls in summer to mark the great injustice done to Dou E. Will her father Dou Tianzhang return to take vengeance? Will Heaven intervene to correct this grave tragedy?

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